United Nations

Press Release

Department of Public Information • News Coverage Service • New York

Prepared by Central News

DH/870
17 April 1991

WEDNESDAY HIGHLIGHTS

- Secretary-General chairs regular spring session of Administrative Committee on Coordination in Paris; holds talks with French leaders on Iraqi refugee situation, Western Sahara and Cambodia.

- United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees calls tragedy in northern Iraq "fastest growing refugee situation in modern history".

- Romania and the Republic of Korea contribute to humanitarian relief for Iraqi refugees.

- Proposal for South African entrepreneurs to be trained for non-racial democracy by transnational corporations with no links in the country, introduced in Commission on Transnational Corporations.

* * *

Secretary-General Javier Pérez de Cuéllar began today, Wednesday, chairing the regular spring session of the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC) at UNESCO House in Paris.

He met with President François Mitterrand and Foreign Minister Roland Dumas of France, for a discussion which centred on the situation of the Iraqi Kurds. The meeting also touched on the Western Sahara issue and the report the Secretary-General will submit to the Security Council, as well as the problem of Cambodia.

Following the meeting, the Secretary-General told correspondents that the United Nations team in northern Iraq was discussing with the Iraqi authorities the creation of "reception centres" for the Kurds and Shi'ites more or less everywhere in the territory. He said he had not yet heard the final result of the negotiations. However, he said, the Iraqi authorities were interested in the United Nations action, and he hoped to hear about the results before leaving Paris.

Asked if the intention of the United States, the United Kingdom and France to provide military protection for the Kurds had been discussed, the

(more)

For information media—not an official record

Secretary-General said it was an aspect "on which we have to reflect; because we would first of all like to be in touch with the Iraqis to see what their reaction would be to this military presence on their territory".

In reply to another question, the Secretary-General said it was hoped that the Iraqis would understand that the objective of the three countries was humanitarian, as also was that of the United Nations.

* * *

Following a four-day tour of Iraqi refugee camps in Iran, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Sadako Ogata, called the tragedy "the fastest growing refugee situation in modern history".

In an update yesterday, the agency said Mrs. Ogata had visited several border camps where an estimated 1 million refugees have been granted sanctuary. She was visibly moved by the plight of the destitute refugees, many of whom arrived with serious wounds, UNHCR said. According to the Iranian Government, the infant mortality rate among the refugees is extremely high with nearly 1,000 babies dying each day from exposure. UNHCR officials in Iran said the relief effort lacked nearly all essentials and it was difficult to keep pace with the need, though help was on its way.

Talking to correspondents in Teheran yesterday before departure for Turkey, Mrs. Ogata said the international community had proven that it could respond "swiftly and effectively" to a political crisis. The challenge now, she said, was for the international community to react "in equal measure to this humanitarian crisis".

The UNHCR head then met with Turkish President Turgut Ozal to discuss the massive humanitarian relief effort currently under way along the Turkish/Iraqi border.

On 9 April, the United Nations appealed to donors for $400 million, out of which $238.5 million was for UNHCR to cover the most urgent needs of the then estimated 1.5 million refugees in Iran and Turkey over a period of three months. So far, countries had pledged about $26 million, UNHCR said.

* * *

The Government of Romania is to contribute some $215,000 to the humanitarian relief efforts for the Iraqi civilian population in various parts of Iraq.

The Ambassador of Romania to the United Nations, Aurel-Dragos Munteanu, said yesterday in a letter to the Secretary-General that the contribution would consist of tents, blankets, clothes and other supplies for humanitarian needs. He said Romania was cooperating with other countries to ensure the transportation of the humanitarian assistance to its destination.

(more)

The Government of the Republic of Korea will also provide humanitarian aid in the amount of $300,000 for the Kurdish and other Iraqi refugees. In addition, the Korean Red Cross has contributed $100,000 to the International Committee of the Red Cross to support its relief activities for the Iraqi refugees. The announcement was made today by the Permanent Observer Mission to the United Nations of the Republic of Korea.

* * *

A draft resolution proposing to have South African entrepreneurs trained by transnational corporations with no links in the country, was introduced this morning in the Commission concerned with such corporations.

According to the text, the Economic and Social Council would request the Secretary-General to continue investigating the possibility of such training of South African entrepreneurs for a non-racial democratic South Africa.

In the draft, sponsored and introduced by Algeria on behalf of the African Group, the Council would also reaffirm that Governments, entrepreneurs and enterprises have ethical, moral and political responsibilities to comprehensively deny sustenance to the apartheid system. It would reiterate its call on all transnational corporations to stop immediately any operations in South Africa and all trade and economic links with the racist minority regime, also calling on multilateral financial and development institutions to cease immediately any support or collaboration with that regime.

Also this morning, the Commission took up the item on strengthening the negotiating capacity of developing countries in their dealings with transnational corporations.

* *** *